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Appearance and Masculinity: An Investigation into Appearance Management Behaviors, Social Physique Anxiety, Appearance Evaluation, and Appearance Orientation in a Small, Sexually Diverse Sample

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Appearance dissatisfaction among women has been the focus of much research. Silverstein and Perlick (1995) argue that high achieving women in patriarchal societies have historically suffered from anxiety and disordered eating in part due to gender inequality. In recent years, the number of men reporting appearance dissatisfaction has grown. Gender inequality in modern society falls short in explaining appearance dissatisfaction. While gender inequality persists, the media has become a powerful and pervasive influence on people's lives. The male body has become objectified in media, idealized as a lean and muscular body that is as unattainable for the average man as the thin ideal is for the average woman (Leit et. al., 2002)

Previous research has shown that even brief exposure to images of the idealized male figure can increase body dissatisfaction in men (Baird & Grieve, 2006). This exposure-dissatisfaction relationship is expected for both genders, as social comparison theory would postulate (Festinger, 1954). However, this relationship between the genders is not equal. Men typically experience less body dissatisfaction than women (Green & Pritchard, 2003), yet research shows that homosexual men experience slightly more body dissatisfaction than straight men (Morrison, Morrison, & Sager, 2004). As social comparison theory would suggest, the importance of appearance to these different populations likely moderates body dissatisfaction.

This research hypothesizes that heterosexual men will engage in fewer appearance management activities, spend less on products related to these activities and spend less time performing appearance management behaviors (AMB). Additionally, it is hypothesized that heterosexual men will report less social physique anxiety, higher appearance evaluation and lower appearance orientation. Last, for all men it is hypothesized that appearance orientation will be positively correlated with the variety of appearance management behaviors engaged in and with social physique anxiety, but negatively correlated with appearance evaluation.

To test these hypotheses, an online survey was developed. After approval by the university institutional review board, the researchers collected data including demographics, AMB (17 behaviors), time and money spent on AMB, social physique anxiety (7 items), the multi-dimensional body-self relations questionnaire appearance evaluation subscale (7 items), and the appearance orientation subscale (12 items). The final sample of 17 participants (13 heterosexual, 4 non heterosexual (3 homosexual, 1 bisexual)) ranged in age from 20 to 62 years of age, with an average age of 37 ($SD=13.19$). The limitations of this sample include the small sample size and lack of racial diversity. Annual personal income ranged from less than \$25,000 to \$150,000-\$199,999. Current body size ranged from 4 to 8, with an average size of 6.29 ($SD=1.31$) on the 9-figure Thompson & Gray (1995) contour drawing rating scale.

The variety of AMB for non-heterosexual respondents ranged from 7 to 14 ($M=10.75$, $SD=2.99$). This range was 5 to 13 for heterosexual respondents ($M=7.69$, $SD=2.18$). Point bi-serial correlation revealed a significant, moderate, negative relationship between heterosexuality and variety of AMB ($r_{pb}=-.505$, $p=.039$, $p<.05$). In terms of daily time spent on AMB, the range for all respondents was less than 15 minutes to between 31 minutes and one hour. In terms of the monthly budget spent on AMB products, non-heterosexual respondents reported a range of \$0.00- \$9.99 to \$100 -\$199.99, while heterosexual respondents reported a range from \$0.00- \$9.99 to \$10.00-\$49.99. Negative, insignificant relationships were observed between heterosexuality and time and budget spent on AMB activities ($r_{pb}=-.203$, $p=.218$; $r_{pb}=-.335$, $p=.094$).

On the appearance orientation scale, non-heterosexual participants scored marginally higher than heterosexual respondents ($M=3.77$, $SD=.72$; $M=3.33$ $SD= .59$), A negative but insignificant relationship between heterosexuality and appearance orientation was observed ($r_{pb}=-.309$, $p=.114$). A homosexual Hispanic man scored the highest on this scale, 4.83. In terms of appearance evaluation, non-heterosexual men averaged nearly a point lower on this scale than heterosexual respondents ($M= 2.36$, $SD=1.32$; $M=3.11$, $SD=.50$). A positive, significant relationship between appearance evaluation and heterosexuality was revealed ($r_{pb}=.418$, $p=.048$). Non-heterosexual respondents scored marginally higher on social physique anxiety ($M= 3.75$, $SD=1.22$) than heterosexual men ($M=3.21$, $SD=.73$) A negative but insignificant relationship between social physique anxiety and heterosexuality was observed ($r_{pb}=-.277$, $p=.141$).

Appearance orientation was found to have a significant, positive, moderate relationship with variety of AMB performed ($\tau=.632$, $p=0.003$, $p<0.01$), a significant, negative, moderate relationship with appearance evaluation ($\tau=-.541$, $p=0.013$, $p<0.05$), and a significant, positive, moderate relationship with social physique anxiety ($\tau=.525$, $p=0.015$, $p<0.05$). These results suggest that appearance orientation, or ones overall investment in appearance, may play a larger role than sexual orientation in appearance management and self-perceptions.

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